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Woodward sees U.S. under siege

Put yourself in poor Bob Woodward's position. Here you and Bernstein revolutionized schools of journalism in this country, turning them into seminaries whose seminarians later go forth unto the world as the highest custodians of the public good. There is no authority for this priestly function in the Constitution, of course, and some would say

POINT MAN

By Richard Grenier

the principle has been repudiated by the American people. But wasn't Ireland pagan before the arrival of St. Patrick? Did anyone ever say the work of the evangelist was easy? Press on! Press on!

All very noble-sounding. But here it's been almost 13 years since you overthrew an American president. (Oh, the glory days of Watergate.) And what have you done since? Oh, you've dabbled at editing on the paper. A little of this and a little of that. You did that book on the Supreme Court with Armstrong. But did people listen, take alarm? No. You did a book on John Belushi of "Saturday Night Live" who OD'd on dope. People snickered. You could still overthrow a governor, you suppose. Or a mayor. But mayors are a dime a dozen. Once you're used to life at the heights, saving the world from

the CIA. Richard Nixon, Howard Hunt, Donald Segretti and people like that, going after the likes of Rita Lavelle is pretty small potatoes. Who was Donald Segretti? You see? People no longer even remember the menace to American freedom posed by Donald Segretti.

Idiot, unwashed public. Ingrates! And here you are, a back number, lying around the house, people not even inviting you to parties any more. Well, you aren't going to just

let it go at that. No, you aren't. You still have at your disposal the mighty weapon of literature, so-called fiction. You laugh, because any newsman worth his salt knows that when a truly great journalist like you takes to fiction, it is to tell the Real Truth, things that perhaps you couldn't source well enough to get into the paper — well, you're honest with yourself, things that

might not even be quite true, yet! But things that might be true tomorrow. Because we are on the brink. And think of the authority it would have when you explained the menace to the public, you being Woodward of Woodward and Bernstein, and maybe bringing in Harwood who's the paper's deputy managing editor. They'd pay attention then.

Already you can see the last scene. The good guy — the John Dean character — comes marching into Ben Bradlee's office, and throws down a sheaf of documents, and declares, "You wanted a story? There it is!" Your overall story would be basically sound, it goes without saying, almost true. Would it make a great novel? A great film? If worst comes to worst, it could always be a TV movie-of-the-week, called "Under Siege" perhaps, and play Sunday night. Some people say television is a slob medium, and you might be head-to-head with a piece of fluff like "Harem" with Ava Gardner, Omar Sharif, perhaps discrediting your Message. But the people would know — Tony Lewis, Bella Abzug, Father Drinan, all of Cambridge, Mass., and Berkeley, Calif., they would rise! Or they would think about rising. At least they'd know rising was a distinct possibility.

As for this basically sound story, it shouldn't pose too much of a problem. Does the world ever really change? Aren't things always the same? You start with a rotten president. That's a fair bet. And a noble press saving freedom in the nick of time. There'll be a good guy in the executive role — they aren't all bad — played by someone like Peter Strauss. Maybe you'll throw the audience a curve, make him head of the FBI, something like that. The rest of them will be all no-good lowlifes like Nixon, Mitchell, Colson, Liddy, Hunt. But maybe you'll be more rounded here, more human, with a couple of half-good guys — black actors would be perfect. One could be an aide to the white good guy. And the other, who knows, may be even sec-

retary of defense. Wow! Andy Young! A black dove as secretary of defense! The others would be real white murderers though: State; CIA; a Laxalt, friend-of-the-president-type hawkish senator; a Republican Party chairman, real white swine.

The story? Oh, yuh, the story. Well, what are people getting all whipped up about? Terrorism? How about *Terrorism Strikes America*? How do you like *that* for a story! Terrorists bomb U.S. Army bases, airports, hotels, shopping malls. Dead Americans flying through the air every which way. Not in Beirut or Vienna, but right here in America.

Then you'll see the enemies of freedom come out of the woodwork. Terrorists? Are you crazy?

No, the anti-Miranda people, the anti-due-process people, the retaliation people, the people who are shoveling out this Weinberger junk about countries supporting terrorism already waging "low-intensity" war against us. You can have Hal Holbrook — no relationship to Dick Holbrooke — as president; he's real good at playing cold-hearted swine. E.G. Marshall, who looks a lot like Shultz, would be perfect as a stuffy-but-hawkish secretary of state. Someone resembling Bill Casey should be in there, not necessarily at CIA, but maybe playing Don Regan.

The screenplay will be beautifully crafted. You'll craft in a lot of loving, really caring scenes for everyone who's going to get killed. Hah, hah, they think you've seen all those midnight movies on TV for nothing, eh? You'll craft in real good lines for the terrorists, like, "The United States has exploited the world long enough!" You know, legitimate grievances. These terrorists are human beings, too. When they go to their deaths in suicide missions, the camera will reach out to *understand* them. A little recollection of the self-immo-

lated Buddhist bonzes from Vietnam wouldn't be bad here, so that David Halberstam should not have died in vain. How little we understand the outside world, bonzes, Shi'ites, terrorists, wouldn't you say? That's an excellent line for one of the good characters right there.

The whole story has to be constructed so that the audience knows that the people the president thinks

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are doing the bombing are *not* doing it. But this president wants to strike back. The swine, he doesn't really care who's doing it. And for those who still don't realize how unethical he is — which the way things are going might include most of the American people — you'll just have to invent something really, really, *really* disgusting for him to do, like putting a Lee Har-

vey Oswald type up in a warehouse window to gun-down some wholesome, caring American, one of the good guys. The killer could belong to a secret organization within the CIA known as IRT, which is not known to exist, and I know you had trouble with that domestic CIA story, but it *could* exist. It might exist someday. Anyway, the whole point is so that Peter Strauss can shout at the president in godly anger at the end that if we do things like this, "We are no better than them!"

As one of the country's most celebrated journalists, you will be extraordinarily well-qualified to place the events in their international and historical context. You can remind the audience of how another great democracy, Britain, handled the IRA. Actually the British suspended due process in Belfast, so perhaps you better not mention them. But how about that other great democracy, France? Lord knows the French had their share of terrorism during the Algerian War, and they dealt with it by establishing State Security Courts. In France, Kathy Boudin would have been court-martialed. They'd

have probably executed her by firing squad. And look what they did to poor Jacques Meserine. Dozens of police marksmen on the roof. Gunned him down in cold blood without a summons, without a warning. Crippled his girlfriend for life. No outcry from the press or public either. And they call themselves socialists!

Forget about these foreign so-called democracies, Bob. Forget the darker moments of our own national past. Forget McCarthy. Forget the Palmer Raids. Remember only the great liberator, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln suspended habeus corpus during the Civil War? Well, forget him, too. In fact, forget international and historical context, period. They're real losers. International and historical context is against you, Bob. Know the enemy.

I think you've got to be very upfront about this. I think you have to make perfectly clear that we are aspiring to a sanctity such as the world has never seen. No other country has ever had it, and we've never had it. But should that deter us? No. We should say to the world: "Give us your poor, your hungry, your huddled terrorists, yearning to maim and slaughter." And for the sourpusses who say no democratic legal system can withstand a major wave of organized political terrorism, we will say, no! If the police screw up reading him his Miranda rights, even a convicted terrorist who has machine-gunned dozens of innocent women and children in an American shopping mall will walk the streets of this great land of ours a free man. That's the meaning of freedom.

And if the TV audience finds this preposterous, well, let them change channels and watch "Harem" with Ava Gardner and Omar Sharif, all about an American girl landing somehow in a sultan's harem. *Then* they will know what it's like. *Then* will they hold our freedoms dear.

Although even "Harem" needn't be so silly, Bob, handled by a writer with some idealism. A Good Eunuch — a John Dean type — could leak the story to a reporter on the Constantinople Post. The sultan could be forced to abdicate.

People are wrong to call TV movies-of-the-week a slob medium, Bob. They can be used to teach people a lot.



Bob Woodward